

## **I Can't Believe It's Not Chocolate** by **veausy**

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**Summary:**

Stargazing, chocolate, and kisses. Or, chocolate kisses.

# **I Can't Believe It's Not Chocolate**

## **Author's Note:**

A very brief, self-indulgent study in narration. I had six completed stories and ... not one of them from Mike's POV.

His secondhand Jeep has been on its very last leg of existence for a few months now, but between rent for the downtown apartment and the cost of gas for every trip he makes back to Hawkins, Mike is shit out of luck as far as getting it repaired. The struggling hunk of oil and metal's always been a trooper, though, turning close calls into nothing more than scrapes and chugging along during the coldest winter that New York has seen in decades without any complaint.

So he's both unimpressed and supremely relieved when they get to the top of the cliff and park under a streetlight without incident.

El's got the overhead lamp beaming down onto the book she's reading, some classic she says she didn't get to read in middle school because her language was still so bad then, and it takes a second for her to realize they've stopped.

He watches her startle, sticking the little yellow bookmark he'd made her in ninth grade between the pages of her paperback and storing it in the map pocket on the door. His face splits into a smile when she turns back to him, hands set primly on her narrow knees, looking like she's waiting for instructions.

There's a part of him which will always be bitter, which has endlessly hungered for revenge on anyone who ever even breathed near El before that one night in 1983, and which sees this action as her ingrained fear and instinctual need to please. A bigger part of him, though, the part which knows her, understands that she's just like this around him, easily persuaded and willing to follow wherever he leads her.

"We're here," he says softly, and the silence of the car is compounded by the quiet outside, and it hits him suddenly that this is going to be

the first time he's alone with El in weeks. No annoying friends and roommates barging in, nobody tagging along, nobody's chattering voices filtering through cheaply made walls. He can see scattered groups of people on sparse patches of grass beneath the open sky, all staring up at the stars wondrously.

El nods, excited, and looks out her window. "I already see a tree we could camp under."

He squints at the area she's pointing out. "Babe, that's a street sign."

She stares at it, and then bursts out laughing. The clear tinkling sound of her laughter never grows old for him, and he watches her head tilt back, contentedness settling in his head.

"Tell you what," he offers. "It's way too cold to be outside for longer than a couple hours anyway, so why don't we sit on my hood under the blankets and then we can sleep in the back if we're too tired to drive home."

She shrugs, reaching into the back seat over the arm rest, and his eyes snag on the low cut of her sweater, which exposes her smooth bronze collarbones and the gold necklace he gave her for her twentieth birthday. A little 'E' pendant glints at him the moonlight, like it's winking at the inside joke they're sharing, but then he glances up to find El watching him knowingly.

She sets one thick blanket in his lap, grazing his chest as she reaches back again for the other, and he knows she does it on purpose, a secretive smile on her lips beneath an innocently upturned nose. He reaches out and caresses her cheek with one knuckle. "Happy anniversary, El."

She blinks her big eyes at him in surprise, and then her face clears, a warm look softening it. "Happy anniversary." She's got her own blanket in her lap now, arms wrapped around it like a child and cheek pressed against one edge, head tilted toward him. He feels his heart expand.

It doesn't take long for them to climb onto the car, and thankfully the engine has warmed the hood enough that they're warmed quickly

even before the blankets can work their magic. Mike stretches out along the windshield and drags his duffle bag closer, pulling a pair of hats out along with several scarves. El is too deeply cocooned in her layers to help herself, so he brushes her soft hair out of her face and pulls one thick beanie down to her eyes, pinching her cheeks lightly when she grins at him.

Once they're both bundled up to the max, he relaxes, head resting against hers where she's got it curled over his shoulder. It's become darker in the time that has passed, and the other visitors have become quieter, a communal intake of breath as they wait for the meteor showers.

"Oh," he remembers, one gloved hand reaching for his bag again. "I brought snacks. There's a Thermos, too."

El hums her assent, but doesn't seem interested, so he pulls out a chocolate bar for himself and unwraps it with clumsy fingers.

He waves it in her face a little, but she just mumbles, "Uh-uh," and keeps blinking up at the sky.

His bag, without his noticing, begins to slide off the hood slowly and he only glances over just as it's about to topple down over the side, but suddenly it's floating back up, hovering just inches off the metal and scooting carefully back toward his side. He smiles down at El, who keeps staring into the distance slyly but smiles back.

The chocolate, which had been pressed up against the cap of the thermos, has melted somewhat, but it's a nice texture on his tongue when he takes a bite. He can almost picture the taste of crackers and marshmallows, wishing they could get a bonfire going inside a national park. He's still chewing when El whispers, "Hey."

He turns his head and looks at her and does not expect it when she pushes herself forward, lips pressing against his. He thinks that will be it, but she deepens it, tongue laving into his mouth and curling just under his teeth. She pulls back, then, and slumps against the windshield again happily, mouth moving like she's eating some of his chocolate, too.

He beams and shakes his head at her antics. Long gone is the confused girl who didn't know what a kiss was and asked Mike if she was pretty. The El beside him now knows exactly what kind of kiss she needs from him at any given time, unshakably certain that she's the prettiest girl he's ever seen and it would be an honor for him to be kissed by her. He's told her long enough that she seems to finally believe it.

He takes another bite, and this time El doesn't even let him chew it before one of her hands crawls out from the blankets she's pulled up to her neck, grabbing his chin and pulling him toward her. This kiss is even longer, fusing their lips in the cold air and warming their whole bodies by a degree or two. When they pull apart, he realizes they kissed all the way through the chocolate, because neither of them has any of it but both taste of it strongly.

He reaches for a napkin and wipes the very bottom of her chin where there's a streak of caramel, and she stares into his eyes as he does it, unwavering. The hungry look on her face is dangerous; they're still in public.

"You're fiery today," he observes, quietly because their heads are so close. She hears him but doesn't respond, gaze jumping in endless circles over his eyes, mouth, and cheeks. He looks up at her once her chin is clean, sees the remnants of the messily-removed makeup she wore to the departmental reception for her honors thesis in the morning. Her eyes are slightly shadowed because of it, like they're deeper somehow, fathomless where usually he thinks he can see all of her in them. "Are you one of these tenacious women of the nineties?"

El's face doesn't change, but her voice is rough when she responds, "It's February of nineteen-ninety, Mike, it's not the nineties."

Mike shrugs, eyes glued to hers, and takes another conspicuous bite of the chocolate bar, inviting her to do what she will.

She does.

She's leaning halfway over him this time, his back pressed tight against the glass and a startled grunt escaping his mouth to find a

home in hers. She kisses him so well that his lips burn and he feels like he'll faint if he doesn't take a breath soon, so he turns his face to the side slightly, gasping a little. She hovers over him on arms that are deceptively strong, holding herself up over him and not dropping her weight.

"Are you," he wheezes, choking slightly. "Are you sure you don't just want a chocolate bar?"

El smirks, looking like she does sometimes when she's used her powers for something but nobody noticed, and brushes his hair back from his forehead, hand coursing down over his cheek and neck, warmth finding warmth. "Tastes better this way," she finally says, when her fingers have wrapped around his nape and secured him in place. Then, she carefully arranges herself so she's sitting sideways and pressed against him, their foreheads touching for a brief moment as they breathe one another's air.

Faint whispers and startled exclamations around them make them both glance up, faces lit up by the particles passing through earth's orbit. This is one of the natural space phenomena El's been writing her big final paper about, months of work culminating in several seconds of indescribable splendor. They're silent, faces close together as they take in the sizes of streaks and the colors and the time it takes for the shine to fade. The sky stays inky blue around the scorched debris flowing through their atmosphere, like it barely notices such beauty for all the other beauty it sees.

They stare for so long that they barely notice when the showers are finished, eyes trained on dissolving spots of shining light.

Eventually, the light fades, and it gets colder. Some people start packing up, sounds of car engines filling the air and children's laughter reaching their ears.

He glances at El, who's still staring at the sky with utmost wonder, face almost buried in shadow but for the sparkle of her round eyes, and that tug in his chest gets stronger. With every day, he becomes more sure of this thing they have, more desperate to water it and grow it, hungry for pieces of herself she hasn't given him yet despite how thoroughly he knows her.

There's a ring that burns holes through all his pants pockets because he can't stop carrying it with him, waiting for the right moment. As his heart heats his chest now, he wonders if this is it, if this time will be exactly what he's waiting for, but as he's contemplating it with increasing panic, she turns back to him suddenly, face completely invisible now that the moon isn't shining on it, and he can only stare into the cavernous depths of where he knows her eyes to be.

Then, there's soft lips gently nudging against his own, and then he hears El's contented sigh, the shuffle of her scooting backwards and settling her cheek on his chest, arm wrapped tight around his waist. He raises one gloved hand and covers her ear with it, warming it under her beanie.

They lie like that and listen to the sounds of dwindling numbers of park-goers around them, eyes open to a darkness so vast that they might as well be closed. He's in no rush to move, and he knows El isn't leaving. She's been safe for many years, her hand always grasping for his and her eyes always seeking out his own. They've got time.

### **Author's Note:**

When it rains, it pours.

Obviously, this is my favorite fandom. I love you guys; I read every single comment and I truly feel the space and the encouragement from you to let me grow, and that's something I can never thank you for enough <3